

Let's Talk About...

Pinworms

Pinworms are very thin, white worms a quarter to a half inch long. You usually see them around the anus and buttocks. Pinworms are a harmless infection in the intestines. They affect 1 out of 5 elementary school children.

To become infected with pinworms, children must get some of the tiny eggs in their mouth. The eggs can sit under fingernails and move to toys, clothing, bedding, or even playground soil. Inside the body, the eggs grow into adult pinworms in 3–4 weeks. The female adults move and put their eggs outside the anus.

What happens?

Most children complain of nighttime or early morning itching around the anus. The itching may come from the infection or an allergy to the worms. Your child may be restless and cranky and may also lose sleep and concentration when they are itchy. Constant scratching may cause the skin to be infected.

How do I know if it is pinworms?

You can check your child's anus when they complain or are most restless. You can usually see the worms if you look carefully. It is harder to find the eggs, but you can find them with your doctor's help.

How do you treat pinworms?

Everyone in the home must be treated for pinworms whether they show signs of infection or not. Several medicines are available; your doctor can recommend the right treatment. Each medicine is given in a single dose and repeated in two weeks. If anyone in the home is exposed to the pinworms again, your child might have to take more treatments. Side effects are rare.

Talk to your doctor about the three anal tests taken a week apart. These must be done before you can be sure the worms are gone.

Your doctor may choose not to treat children younger than two years old. You should not take the medicine if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

How do you control pinworms?

Make sure everyone in your home does the following:

- Wash their hands often, especially after going to the toilet, changing diapers, or before eating
- Trim fingernails short and do not bite them
- Avoid scratching bare anal areas
- Bath in the morning to get rid of any eggs laid overnight
- Change underwear each day

Disinfecting your home is important, too. Machine-wash, dry clothes, and bedding using a hot setting to kill any eggs. Clean the house, especially bathrooms and toilet seats, with hot, soapy water. Avoid shaking out the bedding. Pinworm eggs are sensitive to light, so leave blinds or curtains open in bedrooms during the daytime.

Do not feel bad if you are carefully cleaning and still can't get rid of the infection. Pinworms are sometimes very hard to get rid of. A pinworm infection in your home does not mean you are a dirty family.

Children can go back to day care after they have taken the first dose of medicine. They must also bathe and trim and scrub their nails.

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